

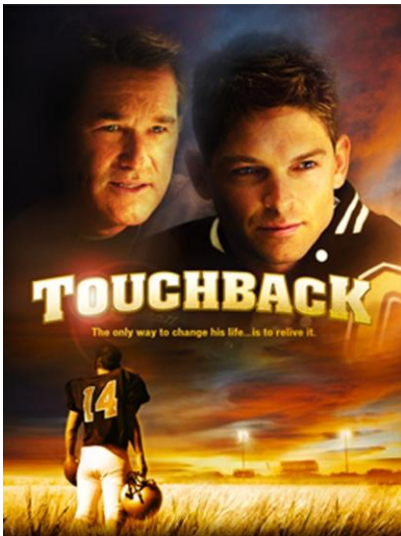
In Theaters

“Touchback”

Existential choices confront star quarterback given
second chance



By Capt. Tristan Hinderliter



What if you could go back and have a chance to redo the most important, tragic and pivotal day of your life? Would you make different decisions, knowing it would change your life’s trajectory?

That is the opportunity, and dilemma, facing Scott Murphy (played by Brian Presley) in “Touchback,” a film written and directed by Don Handfield. Presley is best known for his TV credits, which include “Beverly Hills, 90210,” “7th Heaven,” and “General Hospital.”

Part drama, part fantasy, in “Touchback,” the Sci Fi Channel meets Lifetime meets ABC Family. In many ways, it struck me as a modern take on a famous movie from the 1940s, which I won’t name so as to avoid spoilers.

The movie starts in the town of Coldwater, Ohio, in 1991. We see Murphy as the star quarterback of his high school football team win the state championship on the final play of the game. While diving into the end zone, however, he badly mangles his left leg, ending his football career and his dreams of getting out of the town he and his

teammates derisively call “Backwater.”

Fast forward 15 years. Murphy, now with a beard, crow’s feet around his eyes and 30 extra pounds on his gut, is a farmer in Coldwater with a wife and two young daughters. He walks with a limp and inexplicably still wears a cumbersome brace on his left leg.

While he seems happy in his home life, his family is struggling financially. Circumstances deteriorate and he attempts suicide. The attempt apparently fails, but when he comes to, it’s the fall of 1991 and he has been reincarnated as a senior in high school, replete with his letter jacket and platinum blonde cheerleader girlfriend.

The championship game is coming up, again, and he must decide what choices to make this time around.

We can forgive the fact that a 34-year-old man is playing an 18-year-old high school football player; this of course happens all the time in Hollywood. With his golden boy good looks, Presley is convincing as Murphy, the quintessential high school jock, known – as we are reminded many times throughout the film – as “Mr. Football,” a title bestowed on him for being the best high school football player in the state.

Kurt Russell is great in a supporting role as Coach Hand, and a good ensemble of relatively unknown actors fills out the cast. The somewhat frumpy New Zealand-born actress Melanie Lynskey has a good turn as Murphy’s unlikely wife.

The movie does not examine how concepts of fate or free will come into play – that film would have been better and more interesting. Like Murphy himself, “Touchback” takes the time travel and reincarnation at face value, as just a stroke of good luck. Still, for a PG-13, family-oriented flick, it’s pretty good.

Touchback is rated PG-13